

CLAIMS

1. A communications management system, comprising a networked computing means on which is provided:
  - a translation agent with access to usage data of a plurality of communications resources,
  - a database, provided in a form accessible to the translation agent, and including data in the system-specific format to assist the translation agent to convert this to the common format
  - the translation agent being arranged to consolidate the usage data of the plurality of communications resources by consulting the database and converting system-specific data to data having a common format, and
  - a processing agent arranged to extract and/or infer duration measurement and to calculate staff, transmission & infrastructure costs.
2. A communications management system according to claim 1 in which the communications resources are selected from the group consisting of PBX telephone systems, IP telephony systems, email servers, proxy servers, firewalls, switches, routers, web servers and mobile telephony and other emerging media.
3. A communications management system according to claim 1 or claim 2, in which the networked computing means includes a removable data storage reader to which the acquisition agent has access, thereby to allow externally created log files to be made available to the translation agent.
4. A communications management system according to claim 3 in which the removable data storage reader is a CD-ROM-compatible drive.

5. A communications management system according to any one of the preceding claims including an at least semi-permanent data link from the networked computing means to a further computing means.
6. A communications management system according to claim 5 in which the at least semi-permanent data link is the Internet.
7. A communications management system according to claim 5 in which the at least semi-permanent data link is a dial-up connection to a remote device.
8. A communications management system according to any one of the preceding claims in which an acquisition agent is provided to acquire usage data of the plurality of communications resources and to provide this to the translation agent.
9. A communications management system according to any one of the preceding claims in which the processing agent is arranged to extract/infer a duration measurement for communications events included in the usage data.
10. A communications management system according to claim 9 in which the processing agent includes at least one rule for inferring a duration measurement in respect of at least communications events without a recorded duration.
11. A communications management system according to claim 10 in which the rule is at least one of:
  - a defined time per byte of data transmitted;
  - a defined time for any data transmission; and/or
  - a defined time per byte of data transmitted up to a defined maximum.

12. A communications management system according to any one of claims 9 to 11 in which the processing agent retains staff cost data for conversion of duration measurements into staff cost.
13. A communications management system according to claim 12 in which the processing agent includes a plurality of staff cost data for a plurality of different staff grades, dates, times of day and days of week.
14. A communications management system according to any one of claims 9 to 11 in which the processing agent retains transmission cost data for conversion of duration and/or size measurements into transmission cost.
15. A communications management system according to claim 14 in which the processing agent includes a plurality of transmission cost data for a plurality of different destinations, media, routes, dates, times of day and days of week.
16. A communications management system according to any one of claims 9 to 11 in which the processing agent retains infrastructure cost data for conversion of duration and/or size measurements into infrastructure cost.
17. A communications management system according to claim 16 in which the processing agent includes a plurality of infrastructure cost data for a plurality of different infrastructure types, locations, routes, dates, times of day and days of week.
18. A communications management system according to any one of claims 1 to 17 in which the processing agent identifies unknown addresses present in the usage data but not contained in the database.
19. A communications management system according to claim 18 in which the processing agent causes a message to be sent where such an unknown address is detected above a pre-set threshold.

20. A communications management system according to claim 19 in which the threshold is defined as a pre-set number of occurrences within a pre-set time interval.
21. A communications management system according to claim 19 or claim 20 in which the message is sent to an address local to the networked computing means and associated with the communications event in which the unknown address was detected.
22. A communications management system according to claim 21 in which the local address is one included in the communications event.
23. A communications management system according to claim 21 in which the local address is one correlated with the local address included in the communications event but associated with a different communications channel.
24. A communications management system according to any one of claims 19 to 23 in which the message is sent via email.
25. A communications management system according to claim 24 in which the email message includes a link to a web page adapted to accept identifying information for the unknown address and update the database accordingly.
26. A communications management system according to any one of the preceding claims in which an analysis agent is provided, capable of selecting, aggregating and summarising the processed data.